

Letters

inCite inserts in, not out

Dear Editor,

I was surprised to read of Trevis Lawton's reaction to the inclusion of the Community Aid Abroad brochure in *inCite* (Letters column, *inCite* No. 17). I found the brochure informative and interesting and I have no objection to the inclusion of various inserts in my copy of *inCite* at any time in the future. The fact that Community Aid Abroad paid for the insertion of the brochure was an added bonus for the Association.

I cannot understand how anyone could compare the intrusive methods used by some organisations (as described by your correspondent) and the methods used by CAA. There is quite a difference between the representative of a charitable organisation telephoning someone at dinner time to ask for a donation and the inclusion of a brochure within the pages of *inCite*. I know that CAA does not invade the privacy of members of the public in order to raise funds.

I would advise those ALIA members who do not have an interest in the various types of advertising material included in *inCite* to throw the paper in a bin. It takes little effort to do so.

Marie Quinn

Peccable machines and family historians #1

Dear Editor,

I respond to the letter of 'A Family Historian' (*inCite* 18) in case there are more librarians out there than I realised who are academic snobs or have forgotten that library/information science is a service profession. People are entitled to pursue any branch of knowledge, so long as they do so with logic and integrity. The inquiry into one's forebears and their place in history, which is what most family historians are seeking, is quite as worthy as some of the obscure topics which earn a PhD. If they are more likely to be using source material which requires a machine rather than a book, it is most often the machine and its peccadilloes which lead to the noise to which your correspondent objects. In this situation it is the building and its furniture which need to be adapted to the new technology.

Hobby it may be, but family history is a growing interest, and I find it wholly commendable that so many people are prepared to enter 'foreign' places, as a library must often seem to the uninitiated, in search of information which will

establish their place in a family, a district, a state, a nation and a world.

If such a seeker is an amateur in the field of research, custodians of knowledge prepared to help are fulfilling their role in as worthwhile a way as when they help a graduate of say, law, seeking information in an area of science for the preparation of a case.

Family history societies encourage members to learn search techniques and economical ways of finding the information they need. It behoves librarians to be familiar with the library stock, and I do not suppose many are more knowledgeable about the discipline of business, for example, than about genealogy.

The settlement of a small district in Victoria, which I researched, has a place in the economic and social history of the State. That local history was made up of individuals and the environment; their relationships were crucial for them and equally crucial to the researcher, whether 'academic' or 'amateur'.

Kath Sharpe

Family historians #2

Dear Editor,

It is a pity that the letter from 'A Family Historian' referred to a statement allegedly made some 30 years ago. A great deal has happened since then.

In the State Library of New South Wales today, a special research area is provided for family historians which is open whenever the library is open, 74 hours each week. Staffed by specially trained librarians the service brings together a large collection of core resources for family history research in all formats, including databases and CD-ROM. The library spends many thousands of dollars annually on this area of collection development.

Our expert staff have developed a series of seminars on eight topics including searching births, deaths and marriage records, tracing convict ancestors and using the AJCP, maps and photographs in family history

research. More than 500 family historians have paid to attend the seminar series which has to be repeated regularly to meet the demand. Participants often tell us that these are the best family history seminars available in Sydney. Three substantial pathfinder publications written by library staff have been developed in association with the seminars.

In the past year the Family History Service handled some 35 000 enquiries from those people, ranging from beginners to advanced researchers, who were able to visit the library. In addition we answered letters from across Australia and around the world — more than a quarter of the letters we receive annually are from genealogists.

In the State Library of New South Wales, as in many other public libraries throughout the nation, it can no longer be said that librarians hate family historians. On the contrary they are the single best nurtured group of clients who use the library.

Margy Burn

Manager, Australian Research Collections
and Mitchell Librarian
John R Graham
Manager, General Reference Library

(Another letter in similar vein was received anonymously. inCite will respect a desire for anonymity — or pseudonymity — but like most publications requires that name and address be supplied. Ed.)

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